

Action loop

[Voiceover] Melbourne: garden city of the Garden State; an orderly city of charm and beauty; a busy city of progress and people. It is a big city: big in size, big in population; but it has its problems. Moving people to and from work and around the city every day is one of them. More and more people placing more and more strain on transport systems. Overcrowded trams, trains and buses; daily traffic jams; the rush, rush, rush to beat the clock; the frustration of hold-ups; congestion. The surface is packed.

Beneath this sprawling city a drama is taking place, a drama which will reshape the metropolitan transport system: the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop. Its vital purpose is to expand present facilities, not just to meet the needs of today; but to cope with the demands of tomorrow.

The Loop is not a separate railway under the city, but an underground extension of the existing suburban rail system. There will be three underground stations—Parliament, Museum and Flagstaff—linked to Spencer Street and Flinders Street/Princes Bridge Stations. All suburban tracks, except the St Kilda and Port Melbourne lines, will have direct access to the Loop tracks; and, in addition, there will be city circle trains providing a continuous service around the Loop.

Train travellers served by five city stations will have convenient access to business and commercial houses and shops in the city and adjacent districts.

Designing, planning and construction is mammoth. This is a 'cut and cover' operation where a gigantic pit has been dug from the surface. The removal of buildings and the diversion of traffic was only the beginning to make way for the engineers and a taskforce of workers who are making a complex, ambitious and major investment into a reality.

Construction of the Loop started in 1971. It is changing the face of Melbourne. Tens of thousands of tonnes of earth have been gouged from the Museum Station site to make way for foundations and buildings.

The Loop is not simply one underground tunnel: there are four, each linking the five city stations and designed to serve a specific group of suburban railway lines.

Already, real shapes are emerging. Behind the front-line troops—the 1500 workers who are mining and building, tunnelling and constructing—are the backroom boys: the engineers, the architects and draughtsmen plan every detail and supervise every step with intricate care and infinite patience.

There is a universal fascination in trains, model or life-size. There is fascination, too, in the integration of a ground-level rail system and one deep below the surface.

The top end of Collins Street is seeing changes but, around the corner, 38 metres below Spring Street, change is even more spectacular, with construction of the lower platforms of Parliament Station well advanced.

An architect's model highlights features of one entry to the city's transport system, a huge and vital investment in the future; an investment which will produce dividends of streamlined travel for the people of Melbourne.

Stations are as long as a city block, so placement of entrances and exits must suit the convenience of travellers.

The Minister for Transport and the Chairman of the Authority are frequent visitors to the project. Progress can readily be inspected from one of the narrow-gauge work trains.

Flinders Street is seeing its share of change, including an overpass for two additional rail tracks.

Flagstaff Station progresses: the platforms, the escalators, concourses, stairs and ramps.

Deep underground, engineering skill, reflected in rugged symmetry, competes for attention with the work of the artist on the surface.

Moomba: a time for getting together and having fun; for looking at the work of local artists; for spending leisure time in the bright sun. Only metres away, in the darkness below, rotating

pick machines with teeth harder than steel continue an unrelenting drive toward the day of completion

The staccato of pneumatic drills shatters the eeriness as man and his tools come to grips with the earth's stolid toughness.

Built in Melbourne, the full-face tunnel-boring machine, aptly called The Mole, uses its 60 disc cutters to excavate a seven-metre circle in solid rock at every turn of its giant cutter-head.

Breakthrough! With shattering force and a crash of rock, The Mole breaks through to the draught relief shaft.

There is much to be done. With the flexibility provided by the Loop and extra tracks on suburban lines, greatly increased capacity will be available to the Melbourne railway system: more expresses, reduction in travel time, better and faster train services.

There is overhead wiring to be installed; retaining walls to be built; signal gantries to be erected; ramps and box-tunnels to be completed; tracks to be laid; more rolling stock to be built; additional communications equipment in an era of electronics. The project is an exemplification of cooperation and coordination on a grand scale, between 1,500 people of many disciplines.

A glimpse of the future below the surface for members of the public during a Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority open day. Above ground, there is ample evidence of activity and the pattern of progress.

Machines rumble and dig and bite. Men plan and strive and sweat. Around the clock, the unremitting task goes on, towards the reward of conclusion and completion in the early 1980s by the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority of an under world artery which will carry Melbourne's railway system into twenty-first century.

Credits

Direction and photography: Dudley Robinson

Script: Don Vickers

Narration: Michael Pate

Dubbing: Bob Gardiner

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Produced for Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority by Filmpartnership Melbourne